

[p. 13a]

Sierra Tarascans

- 197 Probably no group of Tarascans has great difficulty in understanding any other group. As Tarascan has not been subjected to intensive grammatical analysis, thus far no affiliations for the language have been seriously proposed.

- 105 To summarize the discussion, the Tarascans appear to be fairly typical of the plateau Indians of Central Mexico in type, but they speak a unique language. Both anciently and today

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TECHNOLOGY

EXPLOITATIVE ACTIVITIES

- 128 In this section are described the techniques of the Cherán Tarascans for the exploitation of the environment. With a few exceptions, manufacturing processes, the uses to which the products are put, and the economic system into which they enter are discussed in later sections.

COLLECTING

- 222 *Plants.*—No food plants are collected regularly. Recourse is sometimes had to edible greens in times of starvation or as an occasional means of bringing variety into the diet. Most useful plants, except medicinal herbs, exist in the town in virtually a semidomesticated state. This is particularly true of the

- [223] most commonly used plants such as *kulántro* (*silantro*),³ the most frequently employed herb for flavoring food. Similarly, *manzanillo*,

- [278] probably the most generally used medicinal herb, is to be found in every garden. Discussion of these plants can therefore best be deferred to the discussions of medicine and the house gardens.

- [252] A small wild maguay growing in the mountains and in the *malpais* (lava flows) is collected from November to May. The heart is roasted in pit ovens and sold.

- 222 One minor commercial enterprise, formerly of some importance, is collecting *raiz de paja*,
412 the roots of a coarse grass. The roots are cut off and carried to Cherán, where they are carefully laid out in rows on sunny, dry days. After drying, they are tied in bundles for sale

- [104] ³Tarascan words are in Roman and Spanish words are in Italic unless they are in frequent English usage. Spanish words with special local meanings are in quotation marks.

[text continues on middle of p. 13b]

- 244 usually near the house, where they spread over kitchen roofs, sheds, and fences. Planting is in the week of Candelaria. No fruit is borne until the second year.

The tubers formed on the roots of the chayote plant, called chinchayote, are dug up every third year on New Year's day or shortly after. They are found about a yard and a half from the stalk at a depth of 2 feet. They are boiled or fried and eaten. In flavor and texture they are superior to potatoes, which they resemble. If the tubers are not removed every 3 years, they rot and the plant sickens and does not bear.*

Miscellaneous vegetables and herbs.—Green vegetables and herbs are usually grown in small garden plots within the patio or houseyard. Most important is cabbage, of which two varieties are grown, one which heads and one which does not. The latter is the more common, producing a cluster of large leaves along a stalk a foot or more in height. Cabbage is an essential ingredient of the universal meat dish, *curipo*.

- On rare occasions, other vegetables are grown, such as carrots, tomatoes, and onions. The latter two do not produce well in Cherán, and carrots and other vegetables have little place in Tarascan cookery.

Almost every garden has a few herbs, the most common of which is *silantro* (kulantro), used to flavor meat dishes. Two mints (kuañitiniš and kuañitiniš kamáta akúa) are grown for use in atoles.

- [278] Camomiles, *manzanillo*, of at least two types are grown as carminatives.

249 *Agave*.—Although agaves (akámbe) are planted extensively along the ditches cut as field boundaries to keep out animals, relatively little use is made of them. There is some collection of the juice, *agua miel* (urápi). Some is consumed locally, but most of it is shipped to Uruapan. No native residents drink the juice after fermentation as *pulque*. Only wild agaves are roasted.

To secure the juice, according to description, a cavity is cut in the heart with a knife and the

* In Paricutin village, chayotes (anápo) are planted in stone-lined pits to protect the seeds from gophers. The pit is about 30 cm. deep. The pulp is carefully removed from the seeds, which are then carefully wrapped in maize husks and tied with the same material.

796 of *catucho* (a word I have not identified) and are carrying spears.

On Friday, the three times that Christ falls with the cross are represented with a cross and the image of Jesus of Nazareth. The cross is very large, but it is made of light materials, so it weighs little. The figure carrying the cross is put on a table, and it is manipulated from beneath the table to make it fall slowly and rise again. While the figure falls, the Jews pretend to beat it and mistreat it.

The Crucifixion is represented at a *velorio*. Three crosses, one bearing a crucified Christ, are placed upright in a corner of the church. The Jews pretend to beat the figure and injure it with their lances. Later in the same service the figure is lowered from the cross and placed in a special box. This represents the Holy Sepulcher and is guarded by the Jews.

On Saturday morning, 12 boys are placed in a corner near the altar. One of these washes the feet of the others. This act (obviously out of place in the chronology of events) is the only representation of the Twelve Apostles.

Some 20 years ago a somewhat more elaborate representation was given which included the portrayal of the garden of Gethsemane. Persons representing Pilate, Herod, and the Jews went about the plaza asking for Jesus. One, representing Judas, went up to a Christ image surrounded by branches and kissed the image. Jesus now answered, and the whole group fell down. Then they tore down the branches and took the image prisoner. Judas went around showing people the money he had received. On two occasions in the past the apocryphal incident of Veronica was also represented in connection with the three falls of Christ. After one of the falls, a girl pretended to wipe the face of the image with her handkerchief.

The activities in connection with Easter week are carried on by the persons attached to the church and the various societies. Nurukáta, laurel, is brought from the mountains in large quantities and is used to decorate the church during the week. After it has been "sanctified" it is taken home and kept in the houses. It may later be used for medicinal purposes. A special food for Easter week is

754 breast (in an arrangement the informant did not wish to explain). Now place the doll in a cooking pot with oil for lamps. In front of the figure put a tallow candle and burn it but not down to the point the flame touches the oil.

754 In addition to the above methods of bewitchment, powders brought from the region of the
832 ocean are extensively used for love potions. The powders are brought by muleteers from the hot country and are said to be made by grinding a tree which grows there. A pinch of these is taken between thumb and forefinger and rubbed on the clothing, face, or hair of the desired person without his knowledge.

754 Methods of prevention and cure against
751 witchcraft were also provided by the same informant. The following method will immunize a person against witchcraft and also cure certain types of sorcery:

[278] Materials needed are oil from a certain poisonous snake, grease from a certain species of scorpion, oil of San Ignacio, oil of Vicente, oil of San Aparicio, a little dry marihuana, and small balls of two herbs sold by the herb vendors at Uruapan. The marihuana and the balls are ground and then carefully mixed with the oils and greases. The witch then anoints the patient's body with the mixture.

754 A person ill of sores (*granos*) may be cured
755 by catching certain poisonous snakes, killing them, taking out the oil, and placing the flesh to dry. The flesh, when dry, is reduced to a powder and mixed with the oil. The genital organs of the patient are then anointed with the mixture until he has recovered.

Marihuana and toloache (*Datura*, sp.?) made into a powder and dissolved in *aguardiente* serves to cure witchcraft, taking a little every morning. Marihuana also aids one to "dream beautifully."

To clean someone who is dying of witchcraft, take fresh toloache, jediondilla (unidentified), an egg, and *jara* (cistus or rockrose). Mixing all this together, clean the patient's body, repeating the cure as many times as is necessary and not permitting him to go outside in the air. It is also possible to cure without breaking the egg, but passing it entire over the whole body. (Probably there is more to the latter method than was told.)

754 A few general points appear from the data on witchcraft. It is interesting to note that in most of the important "recipes" the informant

842 no remedies are taken for barrenness. Others reported that women speak to the professional midwives, who give them herbal remedies, anoint the abdomen with mountain lion grease, or give stew made of mountain lion meat. However, none of the midwives reported any such practices.

847 Despite these attitudes, belief exists that pregnancy can be prevented or abortion caused. It is believed by some that only families of poor economic standing who already have two to four children attempt to use these methods. Others suggest absence of love in the home as a reason; some women carrying on illicit affairs are believed to practice abortion. A good many people seem to know of the existence of abortion and to have knowledge of the herbs used. Consequently attempted abortion probably is more frequent than people wish to admit. The

[842] ideal of Cherán is the large family; people prefer not to talk about those who do not share the ideal and some refuse to talk about it. It is also said that the municipal officials are vigilant in punishing such cases, but as the penalty is said to be a fine of \$1.00 or \$1.50 or a night in jail after recovery, this probably would not be a great deterrent even if the danger of detection were great.

847 Four plants are named as being taken to cause abortion. One, *artamisa*, taken with plenty of salt, was mentioned by one of the midwives. Another admitted to using iris root for this purpose, although generally the midwives claim to be opposed to abortion. The two plants most used, however, are *ruda* and *gobernadorcillo*, *KUASA*. It is possible that these are the same plants; at least descriptions of their use appear to be the same. If they are effective (and local medical men are sharply contradictory in their opinions), many unintentional abortions are probably caused, for *ruda* is a regular remedy for stomach pains. It is not taken, except intentionally, when pregnancy has occurred, as the herb is widely known as producing abortion. The herb is also believed to be helpful to women who have been unable to have children.

278 Much the same accounts were given of [842] *gobernadorcillo*. To have children, the herb is cooked with a tablet of chocolate and taken just before the menstrual period is expected.

- 847 To cause abortion, the root is mashed to obtain
278 the juice. The latter is strained and taken
mixed in a liter of water. *Gobernadorcillo* is
[844] also taken to accelerate the birth if it should
be slow.

842 One midwife purges barren women with the
278 bulb of the white lily. Two or three bulbs are
used; they are cooked and strained, and the
juice given. Three days after the purge, the
patient is bathed and "given a sweat" with
cooking oil and ground salt rubbed all over the
body. This cure is given during the time of
menstruation to "clear" the blood. This cures
the "coldnesses" of the patient or causes the
harmful elements to be discharged. One
patient now has four children. Another, barren
10 years before treatment, now has two children.

- 847 Involuntary abortions also occur. Pregnant
mothers are often fearful of this and sometimes
will not go to curers when they are ill for fear
they will be given a medicine which will cause
abortion. A woman in her eighth month of
pregnancy who was suffering fever and spitting
blood refused to go to the curer for fear of
being given abortive drugs. Drinking is be-
lieved to cause many abortions, and heavy work,
such as lifting a log while helping to build a
fence, is recognized as a possible cause of abor-
tion. If the mother "likes something too
much," for example, a horse or a kind of food,
the child may be born prematurely, but appar-
ently may live. Solar eclipses are likewise
[821] believed to cause early births. The midwife is
sometimes called if abortion is feared. One
midwife anoints the coccyx and abdomen with
the white of an egg (which has been beaten on
the ground) and also with lard and oil. An-
other midwife gives the flower of maize, tomato
peel, a shoot of verbena, and a potsherd of
Guadalajara ware. The potsherd is ground
and the whole made into an infusion. This is
taken twice and the coccyx and abdomen are
rubbed with the white of an egg beaten on the
ground.

- 843 Some people believe that the first child takes
9 months to mature, while the subsequent chil-
dren take only 8 months. While women do not
keep exact count of the period between
menstruations, they have a pretty accurate idea
of the proper interval, and pregnancy is recog-
nized when menstruation fails to occur. Lassi-
tude, heaviness, and loss of appetite are con-

844 Sometimes, when the pains first start, the patient is laid on a blanket which is then lifted by four persons, one at each corner. The mother is then turned around gently for 15 or 20 minutes. This is believed to hasten the birth and aid the child to get into the proper position. The midwife may also walk from one side to another, saying, "I am coming," to hurry the child.

Most midwives specify certain materials which should be provided by the family in advance. These things include scissors, cooking oil, lard, cotton, and silk thread. Parents provide clothing for the child; the midwife does not specify anything for the infant.

844 Some midwives, when the birth pains begin, give the mother *gobernadorcillo* or possibly 278 other plants to accelerate the birth. In any case it is asserted that the same herbs believed to cause abortion are administered at this time, usually with sugar or brown sugar. One herb (unidentified) is called *zihuapaxtle*, a Nahuatl name. There is no use of wheat rust, however. 844 When the crown of the head of the child is visible, the midwife tries to hurry through the rest of the birth so that there will be less danger of the child being born dead.

It is said that many normal births take only about 15 minutes. This can hardly be counted from the time the first labor pains are felt but is possibly from the time the labor becomes intense. Many mothers in Cherán, however, 845 seem to have fairly difficult births. Cases of labor lasting as much as 6 or 7 hours are reported.

In case the labor is difficult and prolonged, remedies of various sorts are used. The helpers apply pressure to the abdomen. One midwife boils a bezoar, the calcareous secretion from the intestines of some ruminant, brought from the hot country, and has the patient drink the water. Another gives the mother hot chocolate made with water and sugar, and massages the abdomen. Another covers the patient with a blanket and has her breathe the fumes from sugar or some sweet thing burned in a brazier. One midwife stated that when the patient is very "dry," that is, there is no discharge of blood and no breaking of the amniotic membrane, a bit of *nopal* (prickly pear) leaf is roasted in

845 inside was foam like the boiling turpentine. By giving the mother medicines the delivery succeeded, but the child's skin broke easily and inside was foam. The more bizarre aspects of this account may be discounted, but some factual basis probably existed.

[821] Another case reported was a child born with the "head all hollow." Yet another had eyes "as though gouged out with a knife" and only the rudiments of a nose. Both children were born dead. The phenomena were attributed to an eclipse. Few cases occur in which the mother has died without delivery being accomplished, but still-births are more frequent. Strangling with the cord is said to occur in some cases. Birth of children with clubfoot (said to be caused by the mother not taking care of herself) and blind children (caused by God's will) are both known. No hunchbacks were reported. One other case where the child's arm emerged first was reported; the child died but the mother lived. Animal births are mentioned also. Only one case accompanied by severe hemorrhage was reported.

[805] Children born in May are said to be mischievous and courageous, those born in February to be half crazy.

846 After the birth of the child the mother stays in bed from 8 to 15 days. At the conclusion of this time she bathes and gets up, but remains under food taboos and spends some time reclining during the next 5 days, when she bathes again and may go out of the house. The midwife visits the mother daily until she gets out of bed, massaging her. When the mother can walk, she begins to do small tasks. Full resumption of tasks is not undertaken until the termination of the food restrictions, about 40 days after birth. Some women do not go out of the house until 3 weeks have passed. After the mother has gotten out of bed, the midwife may still massage her with unguents, either coconut oil or white lily. During the period [278] the mother should not be left alone, so she will not be frightened or visited by an evil spirit. Usually the mother is cared for after birth by the husband's mother, by her own mother, or some female relative. Wealthier families, though, may hire someone to assist.

846 One case of what was probably a postpartur-
757 ient infection was recorded. The midwife

753 swellings occur in the breast, ribs, or back.
754 A curer specializing in this ailment discovers the seat of the pain by feeling with her fingers. She then anoints the area with unguents purchased in the stores. If the first ones do not work, she then tries others.

[826] The blood of animals is generally regarded as bad and dangerous. The black blood from a butchered animal will cause ulcers if it falls on the skin. The cure is to cauterize the ulcers with a hot iron. The danger from animal blood is said to be the reason many people will not use meat until several days after butchering.

757 There are a number of treatments of illness
2 78 which are quite generalized, that is, they may be used on a variety of occasions. For example, *amargo*, is taken in the morning before eating to cure rheumatism, *bilis*, and "fright." *Amargo* is *aguardiente* in which cinnamon bark, sugar, lemon juice, and lemon rind have been steeped for 2 or 3 days. Roses of castile, made into infusions, may be used for any sort of pain or sickness. Persons on the verge of death may sometimes be brought back by putting an onion under their nose or blowing tobacco smoke in their face. A mild diet is frequently used regardless of the illness. Milk and oatmeal gruel are the two most preferred items. *Nurite*, a common herb used in cooking, is also widely used for stomach disorders and colics. *Romero*, *quién sabe*, and *yerba buena* are also widely used herbs. Additional herbal remedies have been collected, but the plants have not yet been identified.

753 Of considerable interest is a class of diseases
754 and ailments which seem to be of supernatural causation. Witchcraft, which has already been discussed (p. 156), is an important cause of illness and death. Others are *é'érpiri* or *jándaku iri* ("fright," *espanto*), *tariáta pákata* ("wind," *aire* or *viento*), and *éskukata* (evil eye or *mal de ojo*).

753 Some informants believed that "fright" was
755 something attacking only drunkards and persons who went about at night, and considered it merely seeing ghosts or similar imaginary supernatural things. A curer, however, described to Rendón an elaborate treatment for the disease. The curer puts a bit of cotton over the end of the index finger of her right hand. Over this she puts a green tomato, preferably

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244 European cabbage (*col*, *repollo*), which the Indians
 262 have thoroughly taken into their diet. Both
 the leaf and head varieties are cultivated. Almost
 every ekuáru in all Tarascan villages contains
 a small patch of cabbages, which are used for
 the famous čuñpu, or meat and vegetable stew⁴⁴
 (pl. 5). A more common stew (*repollo-šakuá*) is
 made of cabbage alone, flavored with red chile,
 onion, and silantro. The leaf cabbage is the
 244 usual variety found in the Sierra. It is rarely
 planted by seed, but by replanting sprouts that
 occur at the base of the stalk. The plant is
 persistent, surviving the frosty Sierra winter;
 leaves are stripped off until the stock often
 reaches a meter in height. Other vegetables such
 as lettuce, radishes, carrots, peas, and turnips,
 although known in many parts of Tarasca since
 early colonial times, are today little cultivated or
 used in native cookery.

247 In addition to the food annuals, the ekuáru
 249 contains various medicinal and ornamental plants,
 mainly those of the Solanaceae, Fabaceae, and
 Compositae. In a great number of the house
 lots women plant a stalk or two of tobacco (*Nico-*
 [276] *tiana rustica*, andámukua), used not for smoking,
 [278] but as medicine.⁴⁵ The *trompeta* or *floripondio*
 (*Datura arborea*); *colorín* or *p'ojénča* (*Erythrina*
americana); two euphorbias, *chupiri* (*E. calyculata*)
 and *flor de pascua* (*E. pulcherrima*); and the Old
 World *higuerilla* or castor bean (*Ricinus com-*
munis) are not uncommon in the house gardens
 of the low country marginal to the Sierra. Euro-
 pean Compositae, geraniums etc., make up most
 of the ornamental plants cultivated around the
 house.

245 *Fruit culture in the ekuáru.*—Practically every
 house lot in most Tarascan villages contains a
 few fruit trees, both Old World and native. A
 definite climatic distribution of fruit types exists.
 In the Sierra are found only the cold-tolerant
 deciduous fruits such as the European peach,
 apple, pear, quince, and the native crab apple
 (*tejocote* or *kaías*) and cherry (*capulín* or *šéngua*).
 In the lowlands around the Sierra, however, both
 subtropical and cold-tolerant fruits are cultivated.
 The former include the Old World citrus (limes,
 oranges, lemons), figs, pomegranates (*granada de*

⁴⁴ Čuñpu is eaten principally during the maize harvest period and on religious holidays.

⁴⁵ For example, in Pichátaro tobacco is taken for fever and is chewed to cure toothache.